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# The Death of the Heart

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Feb. 6—In the year 1973, by official count, there were 818,000 new refugees in South Vietnam—people who fled their homes to escape war. Hospitals admitted 43,000 civilian casualties. Upwards of 50,000 soldiers were killed, more than all the American war deaths in Vietnam since 1965.

Those figures are from a report by the Senate Refugee Subcommittee, issued two weeks ago. It is an exceptionally informative and important Congressional document, but it would be surprising if 1 American in 10,000 had heard of it.

The reason the report was largely ignored is hardly obscure. For most Americans that war is over, that problem finished. We won a cease-fire a years ago. We left with honor.

Those feelings are natural. No one wants to relive pain if he can forget. But forgetting is unhealthy when the cause of the illness remains and is still not understood. And so it is necessary to resist America's weary indifference to the facts of life in Indochina, to seek understanding of our responsibility for the continuing misery.

The Senate report is based on the work of a study mission sent by the subcommittee to South and North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Its members were doctors and others concerned with medical and social needs; it was headed by Professor Nevin Scrimshaw of M.I.T. The mission's findings, quietly and carefully stated, make the reader reflect again on the contrast between the humanitarian pretensions and the destructive reality of what the United States has done—and is doing—in Indochina.

We are spending now around \$2 billion a year on new arms and ammunition and military fuel for IndoChina. Humanitarian spending is trivial by comparison. In South Vietnam, for example, U.S. aid to hospitals this year totals \$5.5 million. We are contributing nothing to help with the enormous job of removing 300 to 600 million pounds of unexploded bombs and mines from the fields.

Cambodia is an even more pathetic example of the ruin caused by an American decision to escalate civil conflict into a war of advanced weapons. Half the country's six million people have become refugees. Half the hospitals are destroyed, a third of the roads and bridges ruined. Once a rice-surplus area, Cambodia now depends on the United States for three quarters of her supply.

On Laos, the report had one revealing bit of news. It said the U.S. mission in Vientiane now puts the population of the part of the country under Pathet Lao control at 750,000 to 1,000,000, or a third of the total. American officials

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always used to justify the intense bombing of the Pathet Lao areas by saying almost no one lived there.

As for North Vietnam, the subcommittee found that, "contrary to official U.S. views," American bombing did "massive damage throughout the country to medical facilities, schools, housing, churches, cultural centers. At least 1 million persons became homeless." The report said the bombing of civilian areas "cannot be dismissed by our Government as propaganda or accidents or minor collateral damage. There is too much damage, and too many people have seen it."

The subcommittee drew some noteworthy admissions from the Pentagon. It had denied, for example, that the Bach Mai Hospital in Hanoi was destroyed in the Christmas bombing of 1972, as reported by observers there. But after the Senate study mission saw the hospital and reported to officials, the Defense Department restudied photographs and admitted the destruction.

Those are among the highlights of this report. Why should we care now? Because of course, the destruction goes on. And the American part in it is not only potential—threats to bomb North Vietnam again—but actual. Only U.S. aid lets President Thieu, as Frances FitzGerald has put it, maintain control of South Vietnam by keeping "the majority of the population in the army, the jails, the cities and the refugee camps."

Our men are not fighting at the moment, but we are still trying to impose our military solution on Indochina. We are just doing it as we did before 1965, by arms and money. Back then we were told that we had to intervene to keep the dominoes from falling, to contain Communist China. Now China takes the Paracel Islands, ousting the South Vietnamese, and we say nothing. Our Indochina obsession proceeds on its lunatic way, long after its policy rationalizations have disappeared.

Some liberal voices have suggested lately that the United States should make General Thieu behave better. Back to the myths of the 1960's, the illusion that we know best for Vietnam! Our military aid, like our direct intervention, prevent the Indochinese from reaching their own accommodation.

As the subcommittee chairman, Senator Edward Kennedy put it, our policy is still made by men preoccupied with delivering weapons and "maximizing American influence and presence." When will we decide that we have destroyed enough, of Indochina and of our own decency, and get out?